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ABSTRACT

After providing an overview of Internet, this Digest outlines information and services that Internet can make available. Specific focus is on the following: (1) electronic mail; (2) remote access to library and other databases; (3) subscription to lists and other electronic fora; (4) subscription to electronic journals; and (5) file transfer. A substantial resource list is included. Contains 17 references (including works consulted and works for further reading). (VWL)

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ERIC Digest
Clearinghouse on Language and Linguistics

Internet for Language Teachers

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ERIC Digest

CLEARINGHOUSE ON LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS
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Internet for Language Teachers

(EDO-FL-04-95)

Kathleen Marcos, ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics

Rare is the language professional who does not have access to the Internet in some way. However, many remain unaware of the variety of services available once the connection has been established. After giving an overview of Internet, this digest will outline the wealth of information and services Internet can make available.

Background

The Internet is a vast network linking computers all over the world. Millions of individual users regularly take advantage of Internet to communicate, search databases, and transfer files. Any personal computer (PC) with a modem is a potential Internet connection.

Internet operates at several levels, beginning with the individual PC. Messages go from the PC to one of hundreds of local networks. From there information is passed from network to network until arriving at its destination, in much the same way a letter is transferred from post office to post office until it arrives in your mailbox (Krol, 1992). Messages can be sent to, and information retrieved from, computers almost anywhere in the world.

Educators generally access Internet through the many universities that carry it. Universities are not the sole entry point, however. Virtually anyone can access Internet inexpensively through the various commercial services offering accounts. CompuServe (1-800-848-8199) and America Online (800-827-6364) are examples of two companies providing this service.

Among the uses language professionals can make of the Internet are the following:

- electronic mail;
- remote access to library and other databases;
- subscription to lists and other electronic fora;
- subscription to electronic journals;
- file transfer.

Electronic Mail

Perhaps the most common application, electronic mail allows an individual anywhere in the world to communicate with any other individual, without the constraints imposed by time zones and schedules. A message can be sent from a home computer in Indiana to another in New Zealand. The sender can compose and send the message at his convenience, day or night, regardless of whether the receiver is home at the time. The message will be delivered to the receiver shortly afterward, to be read at his computer at his convenience. International electronic mail travels very quickly, often within minutes, and is highly reliable.

Creative educators are making use of Internet for distance education. There are a number of language learning projects now taking place on electronic mail, among them a project between the University of South Carolina English Program for Internationals (EPI) and the Latin American Scholarship Program of American Universities (LASPAU). In this arrangement, electronic mail is used as a means to deliver English language instruction to scholars prior to their arrival in the United States. Teachers at EPI in the United States e-mail the Latin American scholarship students a series of assignments designed to take them from basic academic writing to text analysis for varying academic purposes. The students—located in Peru, Paraguay, Ecuador, El Salvador, Colombia, Chile, and Mexico—respond to the teachers via Internet, often appending questions regarding culture, climate, and other aspects of life in the United States. The project has been very successful in preparing students for their trip to the United States (Goodwin, Hamrick, & Stewart, 1993).

Remote Access to Library and Other Databases

Tremendously useful to any researcher is the ability to search any of the hundreds of library and other databases around the world available through Internet. Once a connection is established with a remote computer, users can access that computer as if their PC were a terminal in the remote system. This aspect of Internet use is carried out using Telnet, special software generally accessible to Internet users. Through Telnet, an Internet user can logon to bibliographic databases (library catalogs are a prime example) at major universities and to full-text databases and other online services. Over 350 universities, public libraries, and government agencies—including the Library of Congress—allow Internet users access to their electronic card catalogs and databases. Researchers can search the databases, retrieve text (and in some cases, graphics), and save the results to their own computer.

Recently developed "gopher" programs allow users to search groups of the above information sources to gather data on topics of interest. Internet gophers run off users' systems and connect to remote computers to access databases, directories, and text (such as press releases). Gophers are designed to be user-friendly and exist on almost every large system on the Internet.

ERIC is an important example of a database that can be located using gophers, allowing interested ERIC users to search for documents by title, author, and descriptor from their own PCs. Guidance on locating ERIC via gophers is available from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Information and Technology at askeric@ericir.syr.edu or 1-800-464-9107.

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Subscription to Lists and Other Electronic Fora

Of particular interest to language professionals are the many electronic mailing lists (lists) and bulletin boards currently in service. Some focus on issues of language learning, others on discussions of culture or current affairs. News items from many countries are retrievable in English and other languages. These lists provide a way to find colleagues interested in specific (sometimes exotic) issues and also provide a forum for discussions on teaching methodology, books, or politics. For example, subscribers to the DONOSY@NDCVX.CC.ND.EDU list can obtain weekly news from Poland in both Polish and English. The CHINESE@KENYON.EDU list promotes communication between teachers and students of the Chinese language. Any number of people have formed language clubs or discovered professional opportunities via Internet lists. They also offer a means of locating native speakers of various languages.

Electronic fora such as the Foreign Language Education Forum (FLEFO) on CompuServe allow foreign language and bilingual education teachers to contact each other, check the job market, and download public domain publications and software. A number of ERIC digests are retrievable on FLEFO. Those interested can subscribe by discussing FLEFO with their CompuServe representative.

A very thorough directory of international and language-related lists is available by sending the message GET FLTEACH FLLISTS to listserv@ubvm.cc. buffalo.edu (or listserv@ubvm. bitnet). It can also be retrieved by sending the message GET LIST OFLISTS1 to listserv@cunyvm.cuny.edu (or listserv@cunyvm.bitnet), or by contacting David Bedell at the University of Bridgeport at bedell@cse. bridgeport.edu.

Subscription to Electronic Journals

Internet has changed the very definition of "journal." There are now electronic journals—some of which are unavailable in print form—on many topics. One recent newcomer of interest is *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language: An Electronic Journal (TESL-EJ)*. The journal is delivered to a subscriber's electronic mail account quarterly and offers articles, reviews, and news about the field of language teaching. Subscription to the journal is free of charge and can be obtained by sending this message:

SUB TESLEJ-L Firstname Lastname (Example—SUBTESLEJ-L Abraham Lincoln) to LISTSERV@CMSA.BERKELEY.EDU.

File Transfer

Files can be easily transferred from one PC to another over the Internet. This application is particularly useful for downloading files from library and other databases, but is also helpful for transferring software or text from place to place. For example, a textbook author in California could easily transfer chapters from his computer to his editor's computer in Spain by appending the files to an electronic mail message. The editor in Spain could make changes and direct the altered file back to the original author—within a matter of hours and at minimal cost. Internet users all over the world access public domain software, graphics, and text daily.

Conclusion

There are numerous other services in the Internet inventory; new uses are continually discovered. The list of resources that follows is not meant to be exhaustive; many other useful publications and guidebooks are available to help navigate the Internet.

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